

Masthead Logo

The Iowa Review

Volume 3
Issue 4 *Fall*

Article 33

1972

Letter to Stafford from Polson

Richard Hugo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview>

Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hugo, Richard. "Letter to Stafford from Polson." *The Iowa Review* 3.4 (1972): 68-69. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.1438>

This Contents is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Iowa Review by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.

in natural steam. You have a choice
of abandoned homes to sleep in.
Motels constructed on the come
went broke before the final board
was nailed. Operative still:
your tainted fantasy and the delux hotel.

You have ached taking your aches up the hill.
Another battery of tests. Terrible probe
of word and needle. Always the fatal word—
when we get old we crumble. They wave
from the ward and you creak back down
to streets with wide lots between homes.
When that rare tourist comes, you tell him
you're not forlorn. There are advantages here—
easy pace of day, slow circle of sun.

If some day a cure's announced, for instance
the hot springs work, you will walk young
again in Spokane, find startling women,
you wonder why you feel empty and frown
and why goodbyes are hard. You go out healthy
on the gray long road and when you look back
no one is waving. They kept no record
of your suffering, wouldn't know you
if you returned, without your cane, your grin.

LETTER TO STAFFORD FROM POLSON

Dear Bill: We don't know the new heavy kind of wolf
killing calves, but we've seen it and it's anything but gray.
We have formed a new heavy kind of posse
and we're fanning the Mission range for unique tracks.
The new wolf is full of tricks. For instance, yesterday
he sat all afternoon in a bar disguised as a trout
and none of us caught on. He's a wily one.
He even went home drunk and of course weaving slow,
passed two cars of cops and the Union '76
the usually sharp reliable and somewhat sly one runs.
I guess we're not observant. Aside from the wolf
things go well. This is where you may recall you stood
looking at Flathead Lake and uttered a Stafford line.

Impressed by the expanse you said something about going on and on. And that's exactly what we've done. We have a new club called the South Shore Inn, fair food, good drinks and a panoramic view of the mountains and lake. Also a couple of posh motels have been added, a new supermarket and in progress a mooring harbor for yachts. I personally think the wolf wants to be one of us, to give up killing and hiding, the blue cold of the mountains, the cave where he must live alone. I think he wants to come down and be a citizen, swim, troll all summer for Mackinaws and in autumn snag salmon. I have to close now. The head of the posse just called and two more calves with throats cut were found this morning one mile south of the garbage dump. Our chief said this time we'll get him. This time we plan to follow his howl all the way to the source, even if it means scaling cliffs and beating our way through snow. Why does he do it? He doesn't eat what he kills. I hope we find out. I hope he breaks and spills all the secrets of his world. By the way, it turns out he's green with red diagonal stripes and jitters in wind like a flag. Take care, Bill. Dick.

How Poets Make a Living

Richard Hugo

Question: You worked for 13 years in the real world before you went into academia? What are the differences for a poet?

I dread that question but by now I've developed some replies the audience might find funny. How do you answer it seriously? I hate that phrase 'the real world.' Why is an aircraft factory more real than a university? Is it? At Montana we have people in school on a state 'work-study' program. They were in the state mental hospital at Warm Springs, and some of them are desperately trying to hang on, to remain stable enough to pass the courses, to avoid being sent back. At The University of Iowa, I knew ex-convicts on parole. I've met drug addicts (not just pot heads, real addicts), homosexuals, alcoholics, a variety of the forlorn. Not people you usually meet in industry, at least not in the offices. In some ways the university is a far more real world than business.

Really, what difference does it make what a poet does for a living? Or how he lives his life? Sometimes these preoccupations can become absurd.